

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1-34. (Cancelled)

35. (Currently Amended) A system for effecting electronic payment for goods or services comprising:

a terminal located at a point-of-sale where monetary consideration is received from or on behalf of an end-user to pre-pay for selected goods or services, the terminal operable to exchange electronic messages with a financial network;

a payment processor in communication with the financial network and including a database for storing a list of participating point-of-sale merchants and further including a database associating each of a plurality of intermediary account numbers with at least one corresponding end-user account number, wherein the intermediary account number is different from the end-user account number; ~~associated with a corresponding vendor;~~

a crediting device in communication with the payment processor and being configured to credit an indicia of monetary value to an ~~corresponding~~ intermediary account number associated with the end-user account number stored in a database coupled to the payment processor in response to receiving a payment message from the point-of-sale terminal; and

an interface device in communication with the payment processor and configured to communicate at least a recharge transaction message to an end-users account with a vendor corresponding to the intermediary account number. ~~the corresponding vendor to credit a selected one of the end-user accounts associated with the corresponding intermediary account in response to crediting the corresponding intermediary account.~~

36. (Currently Amended) A system according to claim 35, wherein the terminal located at the point-of-sale terminal comprises an automated teller machine (ATM).

37. (Currently Amended) A system according to claim 35, wherein the terminal located at the point-of-sale terminal comprises a vending machine.

38. (Currently Amended) A system according to claim 35, wherein the financial network comprises a card association network.

39. (Currently Amended) A system according to claim 35, further comprising an acquiring processor configured to communicate messages between the financial network and a plurality of the terminals.

40. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment for telephone services comprising;

~~establishing a intermediary account having a corresponding account identifier;~~

associating ~~the an~~ an account identifier of the ~~with an~~ intermediary account number that represents ~~with~~ an end-user's prepaid account maintained by a telecommunications provider; ~~and~~

storing the association in a database coupled to a central payment processor, wherein the association includes information that allows the central payment processor to identify the end-user's prepaid account when presented with the account identifier;

facilitating a payment transaction between the end-user and a point-of-sale, the payment transaction including receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale together with the account identifier; ~~and loading value into the end-user's prepaid account;~~

electronically communicating transaction data indicative of the transaction, including the account identifier, from the point-of-sale to the central payment processor;

validating the transaction data, in the central payment processor, and transmitting a response to the point-of-sale;

looking up the intermediary account number associated with the account identifier;

and

sending a message from the central payment processor to the telecommunications provider for loading value into the end-user's associated prepaid account responsive to the payment transaction if the validating step results in approval of the transaction, wherein the message to the telecommunications provider includes the intermediary account number.

41. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 40₁ wherein said electronically communicating step comprises direct communication between the point-of-sale and the central payment processor.

42. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 40₁ wherein said communicating step comprises communication between the point-of-sale and the central payment processor via a merchant hub.

43. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 40₁ and further comprising: designating an intermediary bank account; and collecting an amount of money equal to the payment ~~account~~, subject to adjustment, from ~~the~~ a point-of-sale merchant's bank account into the intermediary bank account by electronic funds transfer.

44. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 43₁ wherein said collecting step is carried out in a batch mode on a daily basis.

45. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 43₁ wherein said collecting step is effecting via the ACH.

46. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 43₁ wherein the telecommunications provider ~~vendor~~ is a prepaid platform operator.

47. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 43, ~~and further comprising settling the transaction by transferring an amount of money equal to the payment amount, subject to adjustment, from the intermediary bank account into the a telecommunications provider's vendor's bank account by electronic funds transfer.~~

48. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment for goods or services comprising:

providing a centralized payment processor;

establishing an intermediary account number in a database that is coupled to the centralized payment processor, ~~the intermediary account having a corresponding account identifier;~~

associating the intermediary account number with an end-user account identifier that is also associated with a corresponding vendor;

conducting a payment transaction including receiving a payment together with the end-user account identifier ~~from the end-user~~ at a point-of-sale;

communicating transaction data ~~indicative of the payment transaction~~ from the point-of-sale to the centralized payment processor via a financial network, the transaction data including the end-user account identifier;

in the payment processor, validating the payment transaction data and transmitting a response to the point-of-sale, said response including an indication of approval if the validating step results in approval of the transaction;

in the payment processor, if the validating step results in approval of the transaction, crediting an indicia of monetary value to the ~~corresponding associated~~ intermediary account number in response to the payment transaction, wherein the crediting of the monetary value is not associated with the end-user account identifier; and

sending a message to the vendor for loading value into the end-user account responsive to the payment transaction.

49. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 48₁ ~~and~~ further comprising issuing a card to the end-user that includes identification of the end-user's intermediary account number.

50. (Cancelled)

51. (Currently Amended) A method according to 48₁ wherein the end-user account identifier represents ~~is a~~ pre-paid cellular phone account.

52. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 48₁ wherein the end-user's account identifier has an account number corresponding to a valid credit card account number.

53. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 52₁ wherein the valid credit card account number can be presented by the end-user to purchase goods and services.

54. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 48₁ ~~and~~ further comprising designating an intermediary bank account and collecting an amount of money equal to the payment ~~amount~~ subject to adjustment, from the point-of-sale merchant's bank account into the intermediary bank account by electronic funds transfer.

55. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 54₁ ~~and~~ further comprising settling the payment transaction by transferring an amount of money equal to the payment ~~amount~~, subject to adjustment, from the intermediary bank account into the vendor's bank account by electronic funds transfer.

56. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 53₁ wherein the user presents the credit card account number via the Internet, thereby enabling an anonymous purchase

of goods or services via the Internet by first making a payment in person at a point-of-sale to load value into the corresponding intermediate account.

57. (Currently Amended) A system for effecting electronic payment according to claim 35, wherein the end-user's account identifier has an account number corresponding to a valid credit card account number.

58. (Currently Amended) A system for effecting electronic payment according to claim 35, wherein the end-user's account identifier has an account number corresponding to a valid credit card account number to facilitate electronic messaging over existing credit card association networks.

59. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein said receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale includes receiving the payment in the form of cash.

60. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein said receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale includes receiving the payment as a debit card transaction.

61. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein said receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale includes receiving the payment as a credit card transaction.

62. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein the point-of-sale is a vending machine.

63. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein the point-of-sale is a brick-and-mortar retail merchant site.

64. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein the point-of-sale is an automated teller machine (ATM).

65. (Currently Amended) A method for effecting payment according to claim 40, wherein said electronically communicating data ~~including~~ comprises interaction with an IVR system via a telecommunications system.